

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
LAWRENCE

INFORMANT: PHIL BONACORSI
INTERVIEWER: YILDEREY ERDENER
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Y = YILDEREY

P = PHIL

SG-LA-T512

Y: These are you know, stories you might not you know, consider them important, but they are good stories. And um, well what I was going to ask you, didn't you go you know, to the bars, or were there coffee houses in your street? Or how did other people socialize?

P: Well they used to, they used to go. I went to coffee houses. Playing cards.

Y: Where were, where were these houses? In what street?

P: Oh, they'd be on Common Street. (Y: Common Street) Common Street, yeah. They'd be coffee houses.

Y: For Italians, or for (--)

P: No, no, no. There were Armenians, Turks, thinks like that. I used to drink their coffee you know, their powdered coffee that they have? (Y: Right, uh huh) Yeah, I used to drink that.

Y: And then just sit down and talk?

P: Sit down and, uh, we'd play cards.

Y: What?

P: You know, Polka.

Y: Polka. For money?

P: Oh yeah, sure. Sure.

Y: And you not go to drink beer, or uh (--)

P: Once in awhile we'd go, you know, and have a few beers.

Y: Did not get drunk like that?

P: No. No, I don't like to get drunk. (Y: No?) No.

Y: Yeah. I'm uh, you know, I would like to know, did you tell jokes at each other in the mills? You know, about how stupid the machines are, or uh, do you remember any jokes, or things like that from uh, that's a long long time ago. I mean that's (--)

P: Yeah, you know, it's hard to (--) You know, you tell me a story, like they told me something yesterday and I forgot it already, you know.

Y: Yeah. But I imagine that people in the mills did not work all the time. They must have some kind of fun. For example (--)

P: Oh yeah, they used to, well they used to go to dances, you know. They used to (--)

Y: Where was that dancing? On Essex Street?

P: Oh, they'd have, they'd have one at Truell Hall.

Y: Where(--)

P: There was, on Essex Street there was a dancing school. Oh yeah, Labonte's. You know, where you, (Y: Labonte's?) Labonte. They used to (Y: That's Italian dance?), no, no, it was French.

Y: It sounds like (--) French, Labonte?

P: French, Labonte. And that was a school. They would teach how to dance, you know, because we were husband and wife, you know. And you could take private lessons too. And but there was a lot of dance halls. There was Truell Hall. There was Merrimack. There was oh, five or six different, outdoor halls in the summer. You know? And there was Canobie Lake. And they, oh, five or six indoor halls, you know, dance hall. There used to be dances all the time, you know?

Y: So in those halls people just went there with couple, or without couple?

P: They could go single or coupled, you know. Don't make no difference.

Y: Yeah, and danced.

P: Dance, yeah. You go single and you pick up a girl, or if a girl goes, she's waiting to be asked to dance. And they go. Couples would go. Sure. Yeah.

Y: I mean I hear stories that you know, they couldn't mix in with other groups. If you were Polish, the Polish boy, you asked mostly Polish girls to dance, or to (--)

P: That's not true.

Y: Not true, huh?

P: Not true. Not in my years. You know? Not in my years. I never heard that. Because in fact, I know a lot of Italian young men that married Polish girls, or German girls, or French girls. No, there's no such thing as that. (Y: Yeah) No, there was no barrier for the unclear.

Y: Right. So these coffee houses were, that I hear from you first time, that those coffee houses were in Common Street you said?

P: Yeah, I went to Common Street. There was a couple.

Y: How many. I mean two, three, or five, or (--)

P: Well I went to two of them that I knew. There might have been more, you know? (Y: Yeah) There was this Syrian fellow, Charlie something. I forget his name, you know. But he was an older man. We were young, you know. And we'd go with him, you know? And uh, he'd say, come on, we go play cards, you know? And we'd have some coffee in these coffee houses and play cards, you know, play polka. (Y: Yeah) Yeah. In fact I saw him about two years ago, and I hollered at him, you know? I said, hey Charlie! But I don't think he heard me, you know? Maybe, you know, he's unclear, I don't know.

Y: Yeah. Also I'm a musician. You know, I play instrument, I sing, and so forth. (P: Yeah) Therefore I'm interested a little bit to hear about songs, and things you, or people around you used to sing. I mean what kind of songs did they sing in those days?

P: Oh well, there's, well you got to start thinking. There's a lot of songs. The first, the first song I ever heard as a kid was "Freezing time is Squeezing time?" You know? But then there was, oh my God!

Y: Yeah, it's a long time ago.

P: It's a long time ago. But "Jadda, jadda, jadda jing jing, jing wata." We was thinking of that. But these, oh my God, there's all, but the music was nice, you know? They were nice. I liked it, you know what I mean? I liked (--)

Y: You like music?

P: Oh yeah, I love, I love music, and I love the human voice. Not all of it, but some that I like.

In fact there was this girl that used to sing on TV one time. She was only a young girl, but she used to sing the old time songs. And every time she'd come to Boston I'd take the day off just to hear it. I paid ten dollars just to hear her sing one song, you know? You know, you, that's how you feel about some things, you know? But I like to hear good singers, yeah. Good music.

Y: I mean there are so many Italian, nice operas and songs, and I was wondering if Italian people used to sing Italian songs? Or you know, they were popular songs.

P: Oh sure they did. Of course I never knew too many of them, because you know, when you're brought up with kids around there, you know, but I know the Italians, they sang them, but I don't know the songs, you know?

Y: Umhm.

P: But they did, they sang a lot of Italian songs. Yes. Yes.

Y: Anything you now, related to the work, to the mills? Any song dealing with the mills, or machines, or(--)

P: Well they, they had one, but I, I couldn't remember the name of it, or how it went, but it related to the strike, you know, and the conditions of the mills, you know?

Y: When did they, I mean after the strike, or during the strike (--)

P: Well this must have been after the strike.

Y: Yeah. (P: Yeah, yeah) And uh, (--)

P: Of course I heard it after, but it must have been [unclear] before the strikes, you know what I mean? (Y: Umhm) That's the injustice you know, the [unclear], you know? But I don't recall the songs at all.

Y: Yeah, but during the strike you were a little kid, right? I mean you were what? Nine years old?

P: No, no, I was older than that? I was (Y: ten years old), because the strike was in 12, you know, 1912, I was ten years old.

Y: So you did not really know what was going on, what was going on, did you?

P: Well I knew, I used to read the paper for my father. See? I knew what was going on.

Y: He couldn't read, right?

P: No, he couldn't read. But I know one thing, that when I worked in [Davis and Ferber?], see, I was about fifteen years old. And there had been another strike. There was a 1912 strike. There

was a 19 (Y: 19) 19 strike. A 22 strike, a 31 strike, and a 30, 34 strike I think.

Y: You know all of them? (P: Yeah) I did not realize that it was in 1934 you say?

P: Oh yeah, yeah!.

Y: Can you tell me more? Do you know, I mean all of this(--) 1912, what did you hear, I mean what did you read in the newspaper?

P: Well I used read about the beatings that the cops, you know, they, they, they used to beat up people. They were pretty cruel to the people during the strike, you know?

Y: I heard that Italians were pretty active in 1912?

P: Yes, Italians, and the Polish people, they were a very, the Italians were very active, you know? But they used to get clubbed and broken, and the kids, well a lot of Italians families sent their kids to New York, you know?

Y: To where? New York?

P: To New York, to some relatives.

Y: Why?

P: Yeah. Well because they were afraid of the cop. Christ sake, the cops would throw kids (--) I remember one of them ripped of an arm. They were cruel. They killed a girl, a sixteen year old girl. They shot [rest of comment unclear], see? Oh they were pretty cruel, you know?

Y: You did not see that though? You did not see the (--)

P: I didn't, I didn't, I didn't see it, no. But the only think I remember, was when I was later on in the 1919 strike, I was seventeen I should say. And uh, I was going to get the trolley car to go to North Andover. and the crowd was on the street, you know, there was a strike. Oh boy, I was scared, you know? I won't go there. So uh, anyway, I said the hell with this. I'm going back home. I says, I'll get killed, you know? So that night a man and a woman came up to the house, and my mother answered the door. And uh, they told her, tell your son he can go to work. We know where he works, you know? We know he's [few words unclear] nothing to do with this. And he, nobody would bother him, you know? So anyway, when I got to [Garden?] Street, and they were all piled further than that, I stopped. I says, I ain't going to go through there. But they saw me, and they separated on both walks, you know? And one women got on the middle of the road, come on, come on. So I thought I was all right. Then they never bothered me no more.

Y: It was 1919? (P: Yeah) Where were you working?

P: [Davis and Ferber?], in the machine shop.

Y: Oh. (P: Yeah) Do you, you know, about 1919 strike, there are not much information. I mean it is not written down. And old people like you know about that strike, but nothing really documented. (P: Documented, huh?) And uh, uh, do you know why it started? When, I mean where did it start, and the reason, and how it, you know, how did they solve the problem?

P: I think they were trying to get better wages, and better conditions, see. That's the whole thing that they struck for, you know. Well that was always the condition, you know? Trying to get better wages, and better conditions, you know? And that was always the case. Always the case.

Y: Do you know in which mill it started? I mean (--)

P: Well it started at the American Woolen Company.

Y: 1919 also started there?

P: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Y: Yeah. Do you remember any news reading to your father from the news, newspaper, anything stick to your mind?

P: About, well about, not about the 1919, because (--)

Y: I mean 1912?

P: 1912. I don't remember, what sticks in my mind only, the beatings, you know, and this woman, the girl that got killed. This little girl's arms was ripped off, were thrown in the patty wagon. I remember things like that, you know ghastly things. It was, of course some of them cops in them days were very cruel, you know.

Y: Yeah. (P: Yeah) And um, someone told me that in the wooden mill, in the Wood Mill girls used to go to the bathroom and sing, and teach each other dance steps, and you know, had a really good time in the bathroom. Was similar conditions in the men's bathroom? I mean, (P: no) no?

P: No. I, I never heard that. (Y: No?) But could be, I don't know. But you see, here's another thing. In the wool shop where I work forty-seven years, there was no women. It's all men. And the Wood Mill, later on they had women, well sort of, see. It cost them more for women, but that's trying to keep the men down, see? Their wages down. And uh, so they employed women to take the job. They'd have to truck for them, you know, they'd have to bring the bales in, and after that (--) But that's the only place you had women, you know, the American Woolen Company.

Y: And um, uh, did you take your sandwiches for lunch? (P: Yeah, yeah) And other people also did the same thing?

P: Sure, everybody took a lunch.

Y: And some people complained, you know, or not complain, but they say Polish people always that kind of sandwich, and Germans brought this kind of sandwich. What, I mean ethnic sandwich. Is there any, is it true that uh (--)

P: Well I suppose like Italians would bring like salami one day, another time fried asparagus, you know, with eggs, or fried eggs. You know, stuff like that, you know? What else can you bring?

Y: So there's nothing specifically ethnic?

P: No. (Y: No?) No.

Y: Like French used to eat this kind of food, or Italians used to eat this kind of sandwich, no?

P: Well sandwich, you take like for instance, we know that the Italians eat more salami than ham. (Y: Right) And uh, English and Irish, Scotch drink more ham, you know what I mean? Stuff like that. Yeah. And uh, well, I suppose there's a little difference in ethnic food, but that's not that important. Today especially, it's (--)

Y: No. No. And how did you heat your home? I ask one question after another.

P: Oh, how did we heat our home? (Y: How, yeah) Well the stove. We had stoves. In them days you had stoves, and they were coal stoves. You'd start them with wood. Heat up the house. Wood would heat up the house fast, you know what I mean? (Y: Umhm) You'd put a few pieces, and then you'd put coal. And at night you'd bank it, you know full of coal, but the stove would go out about three to four o'clock, you know? (Y: In the morning?) Oh yeah. So my father would get up early in the morning and start a fire again, and heat up the house before we'd all get up. See what I mean? (Y: Yeah) But uh, well you'd have a stove and try to heat up the whole house, all the rooms. It's impossible. We were all covered up with blankets. Well you know, like in the old days we have to, we probably be five, four, five in a bed. Three this way, kids you know, and two this way, you know?

Y: I slept also [unclear].

P: Sure. You know, cover up with you know, old overcoats and things with the blankets, you know, and try to keep warm.

Y: What about the work place? Was it cold? I mean how did they, did they need to heat the room where you used to work?

P: Oh yeah, the work places were warm. (Y: Yeah) Yeah, they were, they were warm. Yeah. They were heated with furnaces, coal, you know? When I was young, you know?

Y: So how many children do you have you said?

P: Well we were fourteen kids.

Y: No, no, I mean after you got married.

P: Oh me, I wasn't lucky, I only had one.

Y: One girl?

P: One daughter, that's all.

Y: Oh that is she? (P: Yeah) Oh! And she went to school?

P: Yeah, Radcliffe College, yeah.

Y: Yeah. Yeah. Let me see what else um, oh we are talking more than two, three, one and one half hours. Okay, um, I guess that is (--) Can you tell me a little bit more about ice box?

P: Ice boxes. (Y: Umhm) Well they used to have ice boxes. The guy used to bring a piece of ice, you know, your ice man. You'd have a card, you know. You'd put it on the window, you know, that you wanted ice, you know? And sometimes they'd come as late as eleven o'clock, you know because you know, you got to get so many people, there's so many people to do. (Y: Uh huh) And they'd come up with a piece of ice and a tong, put it in your thing, and naturally it's keep cool for awhile, but it keeps, as it keeps melting naturally it don't stay as cold, you know. And you'd buy it, you'd get ice every day.

Y: So you, you take the water out, how that works?

P: Well you know, you'd used to have a pan under the icebox. So you'd have to empty that naturally every morning, see. Or otherwise you'd, you'd flood the place, see?

Y: Do you remember when TV and Radio, and telephone, these things came in common use. I mean for example, when did you have a telephone? Do you remember? Well we had a telephone, we were one of the first to have telephones around amongst our people, because on account of my older brothers, you know. You know, we had so many you know? And my oldest brother, if he had an opportunity was a talented guy. He had a good singing voice. He could act, you know. In fact they made one film here in [unclear]. The Aurora Film Company, and he was the main thing. And you give him any instrument, he'd fool around for a half an hour, never had a music lesson in our life, and he'd play a tune, you know? And he made a living for a few years in the silent movies playing the piano.

Y: Is he alive?

P: Huh? (Y: Is he alive?) No, he's my oldest brother. No, he died about oh, let's see, he died at 86. And he must be dead well ten years at least. Eleven years.

Y: So what year was it when you had telephone?

P: When we had a telephone, it was, well it wasn't like these, you know? It was the upright, you know. The upright. And uh, in fact I remember I was home at the time, a kid, a young fellow, and I might have been fourteen, fifteen years old.

Y: Oh, so it was in your father's home then?

P: Yes, my father's home, yeah. Sure. Yeah. And I ask the guy, I said gee, he says, when they start talking about these telephones, I said, oh my God. Well he says, it's not knew here, it's out on the coast. We've had them awhile, you know? You know, these dial things, before you know, you'd have to call the operator and all that, but when the first dial come in, I said, gee, amazing. I said, wonderful, you know? He said, oh, they've had him down on the coast for awhile, you know, the West Coast, you know? So it's quite awhile that we've had that problem.

Y: I mean what did you say? Why did you have it so early? Because of your brother?

P: Well my, my oldest brothers, you know, they, you know they were well known, talking to somebody all the time. My oldest brothers especially, my oldest brother was pretty handy with the girls too, you know?

Y: Oh yeah. Yeah. So uh, but in the mills did they have any telephones also?

P: No, no. Private, the private in the boss's office.

Y: I mean when you were working in the Arlington Mill, did you have any access to the telephone? Could you call, or someone from outside could call you?

P: No, (Y: no?) no. The office, you'd have to call the office. The boss.

Y: So in an emergency case even they (--)

P: Well maybe if you called there they'd probably relay the you know, the message.

Y: So it would be a favor to tell you that you (--)

P: Yeah, like for instance they say, well, hey, your mother or your sister is sick, or something, or something serious you know? They say, will you tell him, you know, maybe they'd come out and tell you. Yeah.

Y: What about a radio? I mean not in your house, but uh, ?

P: Well I remember radio quite a long time now. I don't know, in my house we had it (--)

Y: When I was fifteen we did not have any radio at home. (P: No?) We used to live in a house without electricity. And so um, (--)

P: Did you have gas?

Y: Yeah, we had gas, and it was a little town, I remember. And uh, so did you have electricity pretty early like you had telephone?

P: Well when I was a kid, yeah. (Y: You had elect...) I remember we had gas, but way way back, but we had the electricity quite a, quite a long time.

Y: So if you would guess, what year will it be?

P: Oh I would say, I'd say around 1914.

Y: So early, huh?

P: Yeah, yeah.

Y: Then since you had electricity, then I guess you had radio. I don't know when radios come. I mean what was uh (--)

P: I don't remember the year. (Y: Yeah) But let's see. Of course I got married in 1927. (Y: Yeah) And of course I don't remember how much, or if they had radio at home. I don't remember, but I know I had radio when I, as soon as I got married.

Y: You had also telephone? Did you have telephone?

P: Oh yes, I've had telephone ever since I've been married. Oh yeah.

Y: You had everything then. I mean these things came later, didn't they?

P: Well I've had that, I've had the telephone at least from 1927 when I got married. And we had our own long before that.

Y: Yeah. What about TV?

P: TV? Well some people, in them days the TVs were in bars. The first TVs. You know, people used to go to the bar, watch the fights, or watch something, you know? To watch something, some sport, or something. And uh, so that'd be in 19 and (Y: after World War II?) after World War II. (Y: II) Yeah, I think so. I think so. It was after World War II. (Y: Yeah) Yeah. I got my first TV in 1949 I guess. In fact, this is a radio. See that's the radio there. (Y: Oh!) I don't work now, because it's my own fault. That's a radio clock. That's an antique.

Y: I never seen such a thing. I mean I thought (--)]

P: That's an [At Water Kent?], you probably never heard of it.

Y: What was that?

P: At Water Kent.

Y: So it used to work?

P: Oh sure. I screw around. In fact, I took the radio off. I had actually thrown it at the dump. I was going to make bookshelves, and then I changed my mind. I fooled around with it too, I don't know. I shouldn't have, or that would work.

(Y: Yeah.) But uh, but that's well, that's at least 1927.

Y: I never seen such a thing attached to that.

P: No, no, they don't make them like that anymore.

Y: Yeah. Well I thank you so much.

P: Your welcome.

Y: And I learned a lot of other things.

P: Well I hope I was of some help.

Y: It was especially, uh, you know, those days are way back and people don't remember. You have a very good memory.

P: Well uh, sometimes it's better. It's not so good today. But sometimes I remember better, you know? You know, my, my mind is like a loose wire. Sometimes it hits. You know we meet, some of the boys, every Wednesday, you know? Before we(--)

Y: Where do you meet?

P: At the mall, Methuen Mall. And one time we used to me everyday downtown. See, because then I could drive better, you know, and things like that. And some of them are dead now. Most of my friends are dead, you know? And uh, but there's a few of us left. We go, and we're all in the same boat, you see? I'm the oldest although, but we're all in the same boat. They try to think of a name. Guys I worked with for forty-seven years. Sometimes the simple name, I can't think of it. The other day I couldn't think of Democracy. It was sort of like Democracy. As soon as I come home, boom, it pops up, you know? You know what I mean? It's uh, like this morning I was trying to think of what the Wood Mill went into. Now it's Honeywell's, you know? You know? (Y: yeah) I couldn't think of it. Then it just comes like that, you know? (Y: Yeah) That's the way out minds work, you know.

Y: Well it is the same I guess to some extent, the same thing with the young people.

P: Well yeah, but not as much.

Y: Not as much, yeah.

P: Well young people have the same problem too, but only older people, we have it more often.

Y: Um, so you drive for a long time a car then, huh?

P: Oh yeah, I've been driving since 1924 with a license. And before that I drove without a license. And old, I had an old Ford. You know, them opened, them Model T, you know? (Y: Yeah) Yeah, with the flaps. I had one of them for a couple of years. [Chuckles]

Y: Do you remember when they started putting time clocks in the mills. I mean I think at some point they started putting these cards, you punch in and you punch out. And uh, when was it I wonder?

P: Well, jeese, I'm trying to think now. They didn't have them when I worked in the Ayer Mill, or the Wooden Mill, or the Print (--) When I worked in the Print Works they didn't have cards, they had this big thing with spike you know, with numbers you know?

Y: Where was it?

P: At the Print Works. But this, this was now in, let's see, I was twenty. So that would be 1922 they had them there. But not, the cards, I didn't see them until I went to Mariners. When I worked all them years we never had cards. The Time Keeper used to come and take out name, you know?

Y: How was the, you said the first time you saw it they put what?

P: I'll tell you what it was. Like a big clock like this. See? And it had a wheel with it with a spike, you know, a spike. And uh, there was all numbers on this wheel, and everyone had their own number. (Y: Oh) And you used to get this spike, push it in, you know. They had a spring, see. Push it in, and it would come out again. You'd punch a number and that punched your card, see? Inside. You know, I remember that, see?

Y: I wonder what did they do you know, if people were late. If the workers, if the (--)

P: Well on the card it shows, if they had cards. But before if uh, if they were late before, like when I worked in the shop they didn't have cards. The Time Keeper used to come and take your time. If he was a little bit late, the Time Keeper (--)

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P: ... wouldn't know, because he'd come a little later himself, you know what I mean? So he wouldn't know. You know. Yeah, he wouldn't know. Some of them used to skip out early, they

wouldn't know. You know, they didn't have to punch in or out, you know? But in the mills I know that they punched in in some of the places, and naturally they'd know, you know?

Y: Yeah. So if you look back, you know, after so many years, would you, would you do the same thing? I mean uh?

P: If I had to change my life? No, I would do everything different. Everything!

Y: Starting from uh?

P: Starting from scratch. (Y: Really) In the first place what I would do, I would go to school. I would go to night school. See? I had started, and I went to the Oliver School, I went to the fourth grade naturally, you know where I left. But the teacher says, oh no, maybe because I could read pretty good, or something. She thought I was better than I was. She said, [blank spot in tape] see what I mean?

Y: Yeah, and maybe get the hair, whatever it's called.

P: Well, a toupee. (Y: Yeah) A toupee. Well it don't bother me now.

Y: No, I mean in those days, if you are growing up and teenage, you know, uh, (P: Yeah, young kids) young kids, even if your nose was a little bit big or small, or it could be (--)

P: Kids tease you. Kids tease you, yeah.

Y: Right. They are terrible!

P: Kids can be very very bad, you know? (Y: Very) Like yesterday as an example, I was over to my daughters see. Now my great grandson, see, I asked him, you know, I was talking to him, and he told me he don't like Justin, which would be his cousin, you know? That's Carl's brother's boy, you know, which are nice kids, you know? He says, I don't like Justin, or I don't like Erin, you know? I said, why? Well they want to make me do bad things. I says, you don't have to dislike them for that. Just don't do bad things, but don't dislike anybody. Never argue with anybody. If you don't agree with them, okay, but don't do bad things yourself, but you don't have to dislike them, or hate them. See? don't hate anybody ever. And I always tell them, always discuss things with people if you can, but never argue with them. Once you raise your voice, or he raise his voice, then it's no good anymore. See what I mean? I said, sure it's nice to discuss things. You have differences of opinion, you don't have to agree with me and I don't have to agree with you. You know, many things, you know. We're all different, you know. And I always tell them, people are all people no matter where the hell they come from, you know? Respect their opinions. Respect them, you know, that's all.

Y: Do you speak Italian?

P: Well I understand it better than I speak it. But it's my own fault. And it's my own fault for my daughter. Not speaking it, you know. She understands it, but she don't speak it. But it's our

own fault, especially my wife's. Because my wife spoke real Italian and Cicilian. She went to school for it, see? And at home we should have spoke to her in Italian. Because when, before she went to school, she could speak Italian just as good as anybody else, because she had the grandmothers.

Y: So you spoke English at home?

P: Yeah, we always spoke, which was wrong, see? We should have spoke English, but when we talked at home with her, we should have spoke Italian. [Unclear], she could keep it up.

Y: But at home, I mean those fourteen children, and your father, and your mother, your father and mother spoke to each other in Italian?

P: Yeah, sure. That's the only think the way they could know how. They spoke to us in Italian, you know. Because naturally we had to speak to them in Italian.

Y: Yeah, your brothers and sisters, they could speak better than you?

P: Oh yeah, you take my oldest brother, Christ sake, he knew real Italian. I'll tell you, a guy, if he had an opportunity, he had a lot of talent. He had a good head, you know?

Y: How do you see your father's job? How did it differ from your jobs later you took. I mean did he work harder than you? Did he uh, (--)

P: Well I don't know what he did in the cotton mill, you know?

Y: He did not complain about home, or did say, make comments (--)

P: I never heard him. You see, I was a little boy when he was working, you know, after that. As we start working [unclear], naturally he had to quit, you know, because alway, I can always remember my father always with a box on his shoulders in the winter you know, plugging along with a big box of food. Christ sake, you know, and we were always, especially the boys, Christ sake, we were like big hogs, you know? Needed a lot of food. And uh, but he never complained, you know?

Y: Yeah, I guess in those days church was important. (P: Yeah) I mean Sundays, although you probably went to the church together?

P: Well no. (Y: No?) I'll tell you, when I was a boy, my mother was always home, see? And uh, a lot of friends used to come in, women friends, or with their husband, and she'd say, this guy, meaning me, is going to be a priest or a monk. I was very very religious, but I'm not anymore. See? I changed when I was twelve. (Y: Twelve?) Yeah. Because you know why? When I was twelve years old I say we lived, there were more immigrants around. You know what I mean? The old old people. In them days kids were dying, people were dying with diseases, a lot of diseases. You know, scarlet fever, typhoid fever, all these, you know. Uh, that other one that's always taken a lot. What the hell's the name of it? Damn it all I can't think of it.

(Y: Typhoid) No.

Y: Epidemic, the influenza?

P: No, well that took a lot of lives, I remember that. 1918. Boy, a lot of people died, you know? So anyway uh, tuberculosis.

Y: Tuberculosis, yeah.

P: Yeah, that's what I was thinking of. But anyway, now in them days a lot of people were sent to Boston, you know. The doctors used to say, well he's got to go to Boston, see. So every two or three Saturdays I was at the Boston Hospital, see? (Y: Why?) To be an interpreter for these people that couldn't speak English.

Y: Italian, for Italian people.

P: Yeah, for Italian people, yeah. And uh, so they asked my father, you know, having nine boys, you know, would you have one of your sons please you know, to interpret. And my father said, yeah, I'll get one, you know? Well I never new why I was always sent. So when I grew up a little older, then I realized the others, the older ones would say, send him, you know what I mean? Sure, they were foxier than I was, you know? The little ones were a little too young, so I got sent. I didn't mind it, you know? I didn't mind the train. But when I used to get to there, I used to come out sick what I used to see, all them kids. Until I saw this kid about seven years old. Blind and arthritis, his knees were like that, you know? Poor kid. Oh my God I says. And they tell me God is good. Then they, a woman come in, she had a baby about oh, maybe one year old in a diaper. And the baby was screaming! Screaming! Now there was this woman doctor. I remember just as well today as I did then. She was about the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. She was tall and stately, you know, beautiful complexion. (Y: Italian?) No, I don't know if she was Irish, or English, or Scotch, or what, you know? (Y: But beautiful woman) But she was beautiful, built nice, and but, she was just as nice, you know? She says, oh my poor, the poor darling, what's the matter with it, you know? And she said, we'll take it here, see if we can find out what's making this kid cry. The kid had big black blotches like that all over the body, on the head and the bottom of the feet, you know? So naturally as I'm trying to interpret for these people, I'm trying to follow to find out what's this (--) Of course when you're a kid you don't know this woman, whether she was Italian, Canadian, you know, as a kid you don't make out the uh (--)

Y: How old were you you said?

P: Well I was twelve. (Y: Twelve, oh) Twelve, yeah. So anyway I never found out what happened about that kid, see, but I always, every time I came back from there I'd be so sick watching them kids. I said, I'm not going to church again. I can't believe in God again. But I always did, but this time my father used to whistle Sunday mornings. All the boys come down and have your breakfast, go to church. Everybody got up but me. He whistled again. I didn't come down. The third time he didn't whistle, he came up. I says, I'm going to get killed today, you know? He said, what's the matter, don't you feel good? I said, I feel all right. Why don't

you to, go have your breakfast, go to church? I said, I don't want to go to church. What do you mean you don't want to go to church? I says, I'm not going to go to church. I says, I don't give a damn if you kill me. So, he said, has anybody been talking to you? I said, no. He said, that's your own idea? We had quite a long argument you know, [unclear]. Then he said, well, as long as it's your own idea, I hope you change, but if you don't I want you to make off that you're going to church. I don't want the younger ones thinking you're getting away with it. See, I always thought my father was at church, but he wasn't much either. But well anyway, that's besides the point. Anybody can believe whatever they want, you know? I respect anybody's thoughts, beliefs. If they get comfort from what they do, but to me it don't seem (--)

Y: But you're raised as Catholic I guess?

P: Oh yeah, I was raised as Catholic, oh yes, oh yeah.

Y: I mean it is as early as twelve years old you were pretty sensitive I guess seeing all of these (--) (P: Oh yeah. Oh naturally you see) I mean you were a kid, twelve years old kid, and uh (--)

P: Sure, sure. Oh naturally you see kids and you say, oh my god! You know, you can't believe. I said to myself, no, that don't mean to say that I'm right, and somebody else is wrong, understand? I don't mean that at all. But for me it don't make sense I said. Well what's this God? Is he good, does he love people? And what happened to these, you know what I mean? But anyway, that's (--)

Y: But the church uh, must have played a big role in those days, don't you think so? (P: Oh yeah. Oh yeah) I mean for the rest of the community. Italians, or Polish.

P: Polish if anything. Yeah, sure. Oh sure, they played a big role. See, my sister is very Catholic. Yeah, I have a sister that's very Catholic, yeah. I thought one, if one gets older, then I remember my mother was not so religious. The older she got, she got more religious. And uh, so um, I see around people you know, they are not religious at the beginning, but uh, the older they get uh, (--)

Y: Well you know, the idea become fanatics. You see, I have, my oldest brother, [unclear], his wife, she wasn't so religious you know, when she was younger, but she became a fanatic. She had to live near a church. She was in that blooming church more, but she became sloppy in the house. See what I mean? Oh, always with the rosary beads. I'll bet you my sister's got rosary beads, which is all right, I don't care, you know what I mean. It don't, that's the way they are. It's okay, you know. But uh, some become fanatics you know, you know? But I always, you can tell, you know I always say, you know, when Henry the VIII, King of England was the defender of the Catholic faith, and remember, he changed the religion. See, he became Protestant. And why? Because he wanted her too, and Katherine didn't. See what I mean. He had [unclear] and she wouldn't go for it, so they changed the whole, they changed their whole religion. See what I mean? Well anyway, that's (--)

Y: During the, you know, when the people laid off, you know, did they help each other? I mean financially, or psychologically if one sudden laid off, I mean did people within the same ethnic

group help him psychologically, financially, or everyone dealt with the problem.

P: A lot of them would do this, see. They didn't have much to give anyway to help out, you know, a lot of them, you know? But they'd be cooking something, and they'd bring a pot of food, you know? They would do things like that, you know? That they would do, you know? But what the hell did they have to give, you know what I mean? They didn't have anything themselves, you know?

Y: And that is the question I uh, I uh, I'm not going to ask you more. Do you think people were nicer, and kinder, and friendlier (P: In the old days?), I have to ask you so that it is recorded. do you think people in those days were friendlier, and nicer, and kinder than later?

P: Much, much, very much! They had more respect for other people. They were kinder, yes. Yes.

Y: How do you? I mean, what is your opinion. I mean how did things change do you think?

P: Well today, I don't know. They, Christ sake, today, in them days somebody had a problem, you know? The neighborhood, they all fell for it, you know what I mean? Today even, next door, they don't give a damn, you know what I mean? You know? And they don't seem to have the respect for other people as they used to have, you know what I mean? I don't know. I find, I find people more hard, harder and uh, I don't know.

Y: More materialistically?

P: Yes. That's today, is get the money and run.

Y: Although they did not have as much as today. You say your father used to make what? Three, what did you say?

P: Three sixty.

Y: Probably he was more generous than today who make uh, (--)

P: Probably \$50,000. (Y: Why yeah) Yeah, sure.

Y: Well anyway, thank you so much.

P: Oh, you're welcome.

Y: I made you uh (--)

P: I hope I, I don't know if I could offer you, I don't have beer in the house.

Y: No, I don't drink. I have to go actually. I have my books and things at the State Park. And this is the end of our conversation, and I thank you again. Thank you very much.

P: Thank you. You really welcomed.

Y: Thank you.